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Dr. Stillman's Sermon.

A

Sermon,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

GEORGE WASHINGTON,

LATE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ARMIES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

WHO DIED *DECEMBER* 14, 1799,

AGED 68.

BY

SAMUEL STILLMAN, *D.D.*
Minister of the First Baptist Church in Boston.

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JANUARY 12, 1800.

AT a Meeting of the First Baptist Society in Boston, Voted, That Messrs. WILLIAM PORTER, JONATHAN HARRIS, and Deacon DANIEL WILD be a Committee, to wait on the Rev. Dr. STILLMAN, and request a copy of his Sermon on the Death of General WASHINGTON, delivered on the 29th of December, 1799, for the press.

Sermon.

2 CHRON. xxxii. 33.

AND HEZEKIAH SLEPT WITH HIS FATHERS, AND THEY BURIED HIM IN THE CHIEFEST OF THE SEPULCHRES OF THE SONS OF DAVID; AND ALL JUDAH AND THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM DID HIM HONOUR AT HIS DEATH.

THIS ſhort account of Hezekiah's death and funeral, clearly proves the excellence of his character, and that the people loved him; and will open a way for a variety of reflections ſuitable to the preſent ſolemn, and affecting occaſion.

He was the ſon of Ahaz, who was addicted to idolatry, and, at his death, left the people in a very corrupt and melancholy condition. Hezekiah, on the deceaſe of his father, aſcended the throne,

throne, and at once began the work of national reformation. In the firſt month of the firſt year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple, had them repaired, and ordered the prieſts and the Levites to cleanſe and purify it, and thus to prepare it for religious worſhip. He attended to its dedication with uncommon ſolemnity, and kept the paſſover with great devotion.

He broke down the idols in his dominions, and even deſtroyed the brazen ſerpent which Moſes ſet up, becauſe the people were led by it to idolatry.

He was not only a man of religion, but a good prince; and the kingdom flouriſhed during his reign. He ſubdued the Philiſtines, and freed the nation from the yoke of the Aſſyrians. His chief object was to make the people happy.

He alſo had great trials. Sennacherib invaded his country, and threatened to deſtroy the city Jeruſalem, unleſs he complied with his extravagant demand. In order to obtain peace, and cauſe him to leave his dominions, he paid him three hundred talents of ſilver, and thirty talents of gold. As ſoon as he had received the money, he violated the agreement, and demanded an immediate ſurrender of the city.

Hezekiah,

Hezekiah, having made every proper preparation for defence, encouraged the people to truſt in the Lord, ſaying, "There be more with us than with them: with them is an arm of fleſh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles." The reſult was, that the angel of the Lord deſtroyed in one night, one hundred and eighty-five thouſand of the Aſſyrian army. Thus their deliverance was accompliſhed, by a miraculous interpoſition of Heaven. Surrounding nations looked up to Hezekiah with aſtoniſhment, and courted the favour of the prince whom God thus delighted to honour.

When he was preſſed with difficulties, he ſought the Lord; and having obtained deliverance, he gave him glory.

That Hezekiah ſhould have been ſo good a man, and ſo excellent a prince, is matter of ſurpriſe when we conſider, that he came to the throne about the age of twenty-five; when the paſſions are in all their vigour, and temptations to vice numerous and powerful. But he was God's choſen inſtrument to deliver the people, and to make them happy. He therefore fitted him for the ſervice, and preſerved him till it was finiſhed. His talents, his virtue, and his unſpeakable importance to the nation, could

not

not ſecure him from the arreſt of death. "And Hezekiah ſlept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefeſt of the ſepulchres of the ſons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jeruſalem did him honour at his death."

The text naturally leads us to obſerve,

I. That men the moſt accompliſhed, beloved, and uſeful to ſociety, muſt die. And,

II. That a grateful and affectionate people will do them honour at their death.

I. Men the moſt accompliſhed, beloved, and uſeful to ſociety, muſt die.

There are ſome men whom we are ready to wiſh, might live forever, becauſe we cannot ſee how their place will be ſupplied. But we forget that God hath all gifts in his poſſeſſion; that the univerſe is his kingdom, which he governs with infinite wiſdom, and hath made ample proviſion for a ſucceſſion of proper characters in all its various departments.

When Moſes had completed his ſcene of ſervice, he fell on ſleep, but was ſucceeded by a cloud of worthies, whom it is not neceſſary to mention. And thus it will be in all future ages of the world. "Inſtead of the fathers ſhall be thy children," ſaid David, "whom I will make

princes

princes in the earth." Such is the divine arrangement, ſuch the all-perfect plan of Providence—"Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." This important truth is the ſource of our conſolation in the day of affliction, but by no means ſuperſedes generous and deep-felt ſorrow, when great and good men fall.

Our late excellent Governor SUMNER lives in the affections of his fellow-citizens. To his tomb we lately followed his remains with every mark of high eſteem, and deep affliction; and daily lament his early exit. He ſleeps with his fathers, and lies covered with the clods of the valley. And before the days of our mourning for him are ended, a new ſource of *univerſal* ſorrow opens upon us. What mean theſe enſigns of mortality?—Why is every countenance ſad?—Why weep *all* the people?—Becauſe our beloved WASHINGTON is dead! He now lies confined in a ſmall and dreary apartment, on the banks of the Potowmack. Thither will many of his fellow-citizens in future time reſort, to ſee the place that contains his precious duſt, and bedew it with their tears; ſaying, "Here lies WASHINGTON—My father, my father, the chariots of Iſrael and the horſemen thereof—How is the mighty fallen." Death *ſuddenly* ſeized him as

his richeſt prey, and hath thereby taught us this awful leſſon, that "there is no diſcharge in this war."

Though dead, my brethren, he ſpeaketh to us by his *private*, and his *public* life.

But what ſhall I ſay when ſo *much* is to be ſaid? Or what leave unſaid without being *unjuſt* to WASHINGTON? The uncommon excellencies of his character, check my feeble effort; much rather would I "in expreſſive ſilence muſe his praiſe." But duty calls me to attempt the unequal taſk, perſuaded that your candour and warm affection for our departed friend, will cover every fault.

General WASHINGTON was born the 11th of February, 1732. "His education was ſuch as favoured the production of a ſolid mind and a vigorous body. Mountain air, abundant exerciſe in the open country, the wholeſome toils of the chace, and the delightful ſcenes of rural life, expanded his limbs to an unuſual, but graceful and well-proportioned ſize. His youth was ſpent in the acquiſition of uſeful knowledge, and in purſuits tending to the improvement of his fortune, or the benefit of his country."

The uniform account we have had of his *private* life, is, that he was fond of rural retirement,

ment, affectionate to his connexions, kind to his ſervants, condeſcending to his neighbours, and liberal to the poor. The moſt unequivocal proof that he was amiable and beloved in his private character, we have in the *early* public honours that were conferred on him by his country; which commenced when he was about twenty years of age, and continued till his death. There is one evidence of his private character, which I am unwilling to paſs by; and which I am perſuaded will pleaſe you in the recital.

When he was about to leave Mount Vernon, and again engage in public life, being choſen to the preſidency of the United States, the Mayor of Alexandria, in the name of the people, addreſſed him in the following affectionate manner—"Again your country commands your care. Obedient to its wiſhes, unmindful of your eaſe, we ſee you again relinquiſhing the bliſs of retirement; and this too at a period of life when nature itſelf ſeems to authoriſe a preference of repoſe.

"Not to extol you as a ſoldier; not to pour forth our gratitude for paſt ſervices; not to acknowledge the juſtice of the unexampled honour which has been conferred upon you, by the

ſpontaneous

ſpontaneous and unanimous ſuffrages of three millions of freemen, in your election to the Chief Magiſtracy; nor to admire the patriotiſm which directs your conduct, do your *neighbours* and *friends* now addreſs you; themes leſs ſplendid but more endearing impreſs our minds. The firſt and beſt of citizens muſt leave us; our aged muſt loſe their ornament; our youth their model; our agriculture its improver; our commerce its friend; our infant academy its protector; our poor their benefactor; and the interior navigation of the Potowmack (an event replete with the moſt extenſive utility, already, by your unremitted exertions, brought into partial uſe) its inſtitutor and promoter.

"Farewel! go! and make a grateful people happy; a people who will be doubly grateful when they contemplate this recent ſacrifice for their intereſt.

"To that Being who maketh and unmaketh at his will we commend you; and after the accompliſhment of the arduous buſineſs to which you are called, may he reſtore to us again, the beſt of men, and the moſt beloved fellow-citizen."

His *religious* character will be eſtabliſhed in the view of every candid mind by the tenor of his

his life; provided the tree is to be known by the fruit.

He was a member of the Epiſcopal Church, conſequently a believer in Chriſtianity.

In his public acts we have repeated evidence of his reverence for Deity, and dependence on his Providence. After the concluſion of the war, and the eſtabliſhment of peace, he reſigned his commiſſion to Congreſs; and ſays, among other excellent things, "The ſucceſsful termination of the war has verified the moſt ſanguine expectations, and my gratitude for the interpoſition of Providence, and the aſſiſtance I have received from my countrymen, increaſes with every review of the momentous ſubject. I conſider it as an indiſpenſable duty to cloſe this laſt ſolemn act of my official life, by commending the intereſts of my deareſt country to the protection of Almighty God, and thoſe who have the ſuperintendence of them to his holy keeping." Thus prays our great military Chief; may ſoldiers of every deſcription go and do likewiſe!

We have another pleaſing inſtance of his reverence for Almighty God, in his addreſs to the Senate and Houſe of Repreſentatives, on his acceptance of his election to the preſidency of the United

United States. Having expreſſed his feelings on this renewed evidence of the approbation of his countrymen, he ſays, "Such being the impreſſions under which I have, in obedience to the public ſummons, repaired to the preſent ſtation; it would be peculiarly improper to omit, in this firſt official act, my fervent ſupplications to that Almighty Being, who rules over the univerſe—who preſides in the councils of nations—and whoſe providential aids can ſupply every human defect—that his benediction may conſecrate to the liberties and happineſs of the United States, a government inſtituted by themſelves for theſe eſſential purpoſes; and may enable every inſtrument employed in its adminiſtration, to execute with ſucceſs, the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to the great Author of every public and private good, I aſſure myſelf, that it expreſſes your ſentiments not leſs than my own; nor thoſe of my fellow-citizens at large leſs than either."

As every thing that was ſaid by WASHINGTON is delightful to an American audience, I will not heſitate to make one more copious extract, that will both enrich the diſcourſe, and prove him to be the warm friend of religion. This you will find in his laſt addreſs to the people

ple of the United States; which deſerves to be written in letters of gold; and will undoubtedly be handed down from generation to generation, till time ſhall be no more.

"Of all the diſpoſitions and habits which lead to political proſperity, *religion* and *morality* are indiſpenſable ſupports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotiſm, who would labour to ſubvert theſe great pillars of human happineſs, theſe firmeſt props of the duty of men and citizens. The mere *politician*, equally with the *pious* man, ought to reſpect and cheriſh them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with public and private felicity. Let us ſimply aſk, Where is the ſecurity for property, for reputation, for life, if the ſenſe of religious obligation deſert the oaths, which are the inſtruments of inveſtigation in courts of juſtice? Let us with caution indulge the ſuppoſition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded of the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar ſtructure; reaſon and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in excluſion of religious principle."

I add, that we have been often informed, that he was a devout obſerver of the Lord's Day and the inſtitutions of religion.

It

It would require a volume to do juſtice to his character as a *ſoldier*. He early diſcovered that he poſſeſſed great military talents. In 1755, being then but twenty-three years of age, he bore a Colonel's commiſſion, and was with the unfortunate Gen. Braddock when he was defeated; which ſad event might in all probability have been prevented, had the wiſh of our young hero been complied with, of preceding the main army, and ſcouring the woods with his rangers. After their defeat, he was of unſpeakable ſervice to them, in ſecuring their retreat.

He was not influenced by a ſpirit of ambition or revenge—He fought not for fame, but freedom. When he ſaw the liberties of his country in danger, at the call of his fellow-citizens, he ſtepped forth to defend them. He was the friend and the protector of mankind. Cool, brave and perſevering; and when ſurrounded with difficulties, always found a reſource in his own great mind. Witneſs his forlorn condition in 1776, when he fled before the Britiſh army through the Jerſeys, with only a handful of men, in want of almoſt every thing, diſcouraged and worn down. In this critical ſituation, when all that is dear to America depended, under

der God, on the exertion of the moment, behold our beloved WASHINGTON—He plans with judgment, and, ſupported by his few brave troops, executes with boldneſs and promptitude a moſt dangerous but ſucceſsful enterprize ; by which he raiſed the ſpirits of his dejected countrymen, and reſcued a great part of New Jerſey from their enemies. The circumſtances of this brilliant part of his hiſtory you will at once recollect.

" As night to ſtars, wo luſtre gives to man."

I ſhall take leave of his military character for the preſent, by reminding you, that when the great objects of the American war were obtained, he reſigned his commiſſion to Congreſs, and retired to the private walks of life. It is really ſurpriſing, becauſe uncommon, that a man who had been for ſeveral years in the habit of commanding armies, could with ſuch eaſe exchange the *ſoldier* for the *citizen*. In this, as in every other part of his conduct, he diſcovered the greatneſs of his mind, and the benevolence of his heart.

But this part of his hiſtory will come with more propriety from the hiſtorian than the preacher.

After a ſhort period of retirement from the anxiety and fatigues of military life, his country call on him to aſſiſt in the formation of a Conſtitution of Government for the United States. Senſible of the importance of an energetic government, he accepted their choice; not conſulting his own inclination, but the voice of his fellow citizens and the public good. When the delegates from the ſeveral States had met, they choſe him Preſident of the Convention; on which occaſion he preſided with his uſual dignity and ſpirit of conciliation. And when that excellent inſtrument was finiſhed, which bears his name in front of the names of his worthy compatriots; which hath been the means of raiſing our country to its preſent condition of reſpectability and opulence, he again retired to Mount Vernon. But now all eyes are fixed on him as the moſt proper perſon to preſide over the Union. The united voice of three millions of citizens he could not withſtand. His ſentiments and feelings on this occaſion, are excellently expreſſed in the following anſwer to the addreſs of the mayor and people of Alexandria, when he was about to repair to the ſeat of government.

"GENTLEMEN,

"GENTLEMEN,

"ALTHOUGH I ought not to conceal, yet I cannot deſcribe the painful emotions which I felt in being called upon to determine whether I would accept or refuſe the preſidency of the United States. The unanimity in the choice, the opinion of my friends, communicated from different parts of Europe, as well as from America, the apparent wiſh of thoſe who were not entirely ſatisfied with the conſtitution in its preſent form; and an ardent deſire on my part to be inſtrumental in connecting the good will of my countrymen towards each other; have induced an acceptance. Thoſe who know me beſt (and you, my fellow-citizens, are from your ſituation, in that number) know better than any others, my love of retirement is ſo great, that no earthly conſideration, ſhort of a conviction of duty, could have prevailed upon me to depart from my reſolution, "never more to take any ſhare in tranſactions of a public nature." For at my age and in my circumſtances, what proſpects or advantages could I propoſe to myſelf, for embarking again on the tempeſtuous and uncertain ocean of public life?"

This repeated ſacrifice of his domeſtic eaſe and happineſs to the voice of the people, drew from

from them new and ardent expreſſions of gratitude and love to him. Various parts of the country through which he paſſed to the ſeat of government, were crowded with citizens of every deſcription, who diſcovered ſuch a deſire to ſee the Man, to whom they owed ſo much, as greatly affected him, and cauſed him to weep.

His firſt interview with Congreſs on his arrival at New-York, was ſolemn and intereſting. To the hiſtory of that day I refer you, becauſe no abridgment of its tranſactions can be admitted without injury.

Eight years he filled that exalted and arduous ſtation, with honour to himſelf and great advantage to his country; conſtantly purſuing her beſt intereſts.

When the time drew near that a choice was to be made of Preſident of the United States, he declined being conſidered as a candidate. This determination deeply affected his countrymen. But conſidering his time of life, and that he had devoted forty-five years of it already to their ſervice, they could not urge him to relinquiſh it.

On this occaſion, I can only ſay, that it was WASHINGTON: a name, which in all future

ages

ages ought to be conſidered as a *general term*, including every thing great and excellent in the human character. Behold this man, admired by a world; of his own accord deſcending from his high ſtation of THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, to become the farmer of Mount Vernon—the private citizen; which introduces the laſt ſolemn ſcene.

On Friday the 13th inſt. he appeared to have taken a cold, which principally affected his throat; of which he made but little complaint. About three o'clock on Saturday morning his diſeaſe became alarming: phyſicians were ſent for, but they came too late. Heaven's great decree had paſſed, that WASHINGTON ſhould die. "This laſt ſcene correſponded with the whole tenor of his life. Not a groan nor a complaint eſcaped him, though in extreme diſtreſs. With perfect reſignation, and a full poſſeſſion of his reaſon, he cloſed his well ſpent life."* Death to him was an enemy diſarmed.

We ſincerely ſympathize with the diſconſolate widow, and wiſh her every divine conſolation under her irreparable loſs. But ſhe ſorrows not as they who have no hope. The immortal ſpirit of that excellent man, the partner of

* Mr. Lear's Letter.

of her life, who hath left a nation in tears, hath, we truſt, aſcended to an infinitely better world, to receive the rewards of a good and faithful ſervant;

II. While an affectionate and grateful people do him honour at his death.

The moment the melancholy news arrived, that our beloved Chief was dead, every countenance was ſad—buſineſs was ſuſpended—and tears flowed from eyes not uſed to weep.—All the people felt alike. Theſe artleſs effuſions of the heart are far more honourable than the ſculptured monument, or moſt elegant panegyric. But as ſucceeding generations will not feel as we do, who know the man, let us perpetuate his memory by every proper method. Let us impreſs on the minds of our children and youth a ſenſe of the virtues and talents of WASHINGTON, and urge them to go and do likewiſe. Let the faithful hiſtorian tranſmit to generations yet unborn, his private and his public character. Let men who occupy the higheſt offices of government not only *applaud*, but *imitate* his virtues. For even kings may learn from him what mode of conduct to purſue

ſue to make the people happy, and live in their affections.

But I leave this matter to my afflicted fellow-citizens, who will, with one ſoul, deviſe the beſt method of doing laſting honour to his memory.

The ſubject ſuggeſts a variety of uſeful reflections.

1. If the man whoſe death we now deplore, poſſeſſed ſo many excellencies, as the united voice of his countrymen and of foreigners aſcribe to him, I aſk, Whence were they derived? Certainly from the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and every perfect gift. If then ſuch are the ſtreams, what muſt the fountain be? If the perſonal excellencies of a man can attract the admiration of a nation, how ought we to be ſwallowed up in love and adoration of that God, in whom dwells eſſentially every poſſible perfection!

Permit me alſo to inquire, how it happens, that a people feelingly alive to excellence of character, ſhould ſo generally forget our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is the brightneſs of the Father's glory, and expreſs image of his perſon: in whom dwells all the fulneſs of the Godhead bodily. Who hath left us in his life a moſt perfect

perfect example of every thing amiable and praiſe-worthy; and by his one offering hath perfected for ever all them who are ſanctified. He is infinite in excellence, and abundant in grace and goodneſs: yet to crowds he appears without form or comelineſs. This awful evidence of human depravity we bewail.

2. That ſolemn inſtance of death which now arreſts our attention, is a loud call to all, eſpecially to the rulers of the people, to be always ready, becauſe they know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man will come. They hence learn that they are to die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Death will ſoon level all diſtinctions, and after death the judgment; when Jehovah will render to every man according to his works. It becomes us all to entertain a lively ſenſe of that awful period, when God will judge the ſecrets of men by Jeſus Chriſt; and to be prepared for it, that we may give up our account with joy, and not with grief.

In fine—We are under every obligation to mingle thankſgivings to God, with the ſorrows of the occaſion, becauſe a life ſo important to our country hath been ſpared ſo long. A kind

Providence

Providence lent us a WASHINGTON—fitted him for the various and arduous ſervices in which he was employed—covered his head in the day of battle—preſerved him amidſt innumerable dangers, till the great affairs of our country, civil and military, were happily arranged. Till this period, he was immortal. However much we feel our loſs, we bleſs the Lord that he did not fall before. His work was done; and he hath come to his grave in a full age, like as a ſhock of corn cometh in, in his ſeaſon. He hath paſſed through life and deſcended to his grave with *unſought*, *unſullied* honours.

There are ſome men who are always in eager purſuit of fame, from whom ſhe keeps a cautious diſtance: not ſo WASHINGTON. With full ſpread pinions ſhe purſued him all his life, ſolicitous to beſtow on him thoſe diſtinguiſhed rewards which were due to his uncommon merit, which he received with that modeſty and diffidence in himſelf, that were peculiar to a mind like his. And at this moment, while ſilent in the tomb, a nation is engaged to do him honour. —Surpriſing man!—

But we leave for a moment the tomb of our much loved friend, to offer praiſe to

Almighty God, for the many promiſing and uſeful characters that riſe before us: eſpecially that ADAMS yet lives to ſerve his country. May the Lord long preſerve and bleſs him, and think on him for good, according to all that he hath done for this people.